

CLIFF BENTZ
SECOND DISTRICT, OREGON

WASHINGTON D.C. OFFICE:
1239 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
TEL: (202) 225-6730

DISTRICT OFFICES:
14 N CENTRAL AVENUE, SUITE 112
MEDFORD, OR 97501
TEL: (541) 776-4646
FAX: (541) 779-0204

2430 SW 4TH AVENUE, SUITE 2
ONTARIO, OR 97914
TEL: (541) 709-2040



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, OCEANS,
AND WILDLIFE

SUBCOMMITTEE FOR INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES OF THE UNITED STATES

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ANTITRUST, COMMERCIAL,
AND ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COURTS,
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY,
AND THE INTERNET

March 8, 2022

Hon. Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Hon. Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C St SW
Washington, DC 20024

Hon. Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Haaland, Secretary Vilsack, and Administrator Criswell,

We write to you today requesting information about the jointly established Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission ("Commission"), which was authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act ("Act").

The National Interagency Coordination Center reported that nearly 59,000 wildfires took place in the US in 2021, burning over 7 million acres.¹ The year before, 10 million acres burned. Decades of failed forest management policies have left forested communities at extreme risk from uncontrollable wildfires. Property, businesses, crops, livestock, and human lives have been lost as a direct result of these disastrous policies, and the danger will only grow if the Administration does not act immediately. It is imperative that the Commission fulfill its objective to "[combat] the nation's wildfire crisis and [improve] resilience in America's landscapes."²

Given the urgency surrounding the upcoming wildfire season and the imminent threat that wildfires pose to communities in our districts, we are concerned by the fact that your agencies have missed the deadlines, as specified by law, to establish the Commission. The Act stipulated that all members of the Commission must be appointed within 60 days of enactment, and a meeting must take place within the 30 days following. The 60-day deadline has passed, and the

¹ https://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/intelligence/2021_statsumm/annual_report_2021.pdf

² <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20211217/fema-usda-and-doi-jointly-establish-new-wildland-fire-mitigation-and>

agencies have given no indication that there is a plan to complete the appointment process in a timely fashion.

As Members representing districts that are in danger from wildfires, we ask that you respond to the following questions:

1. Have any appointees for the Commission been selected? With the deadline having already passed, what is your current timeline for selecting members?
2. Do the Secretaries need to agree on all members appointed to the Commission?
3. Will the United States Fire Administration be represented on the Commission?
4. Will the Commission appoint members with specific, extensive experience in each of the following areas:
 - a. Forest management
 - b. Aerial wildland firefighting, i.e., Air Tactical Supervisor and/or Air Tactical Group Supervisor
 - c. Ground wildland firefighting, i.e., Incident Commander, Operations Section Chief, Division/Group Supervisor
 - d. Fire program management with the DOI or USFS
 - e. Fire chemicals expertise to consider recent advances in the use of long-term fire retardants
5. Is the Commission subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA)? If so, what protocols will your agencies use to facilitate Congressional oversight of the Commission?
6. When will the Commission present its plan to address wildfire risks prior to the summer months, which are expected to be hot and dry in many of the highest risk areas? How will the delays in appointing members to the Commission and holding its first meeting affect the timeliness of the plan being developed?
7. How will your agencies ensure that the Commission coordinates with the Wildland Fire Leadership Council and the White House Wildfire Resilience Interagency Working Group to improve and expedite the administration's response to wildfire?
8. What actions will the Commission take to address the disproportionate number of large fires that start on federal land?
9. What actions will the Commission take to promote mechanical fuels treatment, given the risks associated with prescribed burning alone on extremely overgrown forests?
10. The Federal Firefighting Agencies are at or near capacity for managing the existing number of aircraft available under existing contracts. How will the Agencies increase

their infrastructure (aircraft managers, manager trainees, designated aircraft bases and other infrastructure) to adequately manage additional aerial firefighting assets?

11. Will DoD be timely in supplying its inventory of surplus aviation assets to the Commission?

We request a written response to the questions above within 30 days of receipt of this letter. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress



Lauren Boebert
Member of Congress



Ken Calvert
Member of Congress



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



Jay Obernolte
Member of Congress



Matthew Rosendale, Sr.
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber
Member of Congress